

Message Text

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O R 041335Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1692
INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMCONSUL MADRAS
AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
USLO PEKING
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CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 NEW DELHI 3214

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS:* PINT, IN
SUBJECT: INDIAN ELECTIONS: SPECULATIONS ON THE OUTCOME

REF: NEW DELHI 2839

SUMMARY: WHILE WE CONTINUE TO REFRAIN FROM TRYING TO PREDICT
THE OUTCOME OF THE LOK SABHA ELECTIONS, THE PRESS, OTHER
OBSERVERS AND THE CONTESTING PARTIES THEMSELVES FEEL NO
INHIBITIONS ON SPECULATING ABOUT THE RESULTS. MOST AGREE THAT
CONGRESS IS IN A TOUGH FIGHT WITH THE OPPOSITION AND THAT THE
SIZE OF THE WINNER'S MAJORITY MAY BE RELATIVELY SMALL. THIS
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MESSAGE ATTEMPTS TO PROVIDE AN ASSESSMENT OF THE OVERALL RANGE
OF ESTIMATES. WHILE THE PRESS, INCLUDING THE OPPOSITION PAPERS,
HAS BEEN CAUTIOUS NOT TO MAKE ITS OWN PREDICTIONS ON THE
RESULTS, CORRESPONDENTS FROM MANY OF THE NATIONAL DAILIES HAVE
TAKEN RANDOM SAMPLINGS OF VOTER MOODS IN VARIOUS STATES,
PARTICULARLY IN THE CRUCIAL NORTHERN "HINDI BELT". THEIR SURVEYS,
WHILE NEITHER SCIENTIFIC NOR COMPREHENSIVE, TEND TO SUPPORT THE
BLOWING OF A "JANATA WIND" THROUGH MUCH OF THE NORTH. IT IS NOT
POSSIBLE TO EXTRAPOLATE FROM THESE JOURNALISTIC REPORTS ANY
NATIONWIDE PREDICTION, BUT PEOPLE ARE SPECULATING ON SEATS

LIKELY TO GO FOR CONGRESS; THEIR PREDICTIONS VARY CONSIDERABLY (FROM 250 TO 325), BUT MOST SEEM TO FOCUS ON A NARROW (AND CONSISTENT) RANGE HOVERING AROUND 280 TO 300, A MAJORITY WHICH WOULD BE TOO SLENDER FOR CONGRESS COMFORT. SUCH SPECULATION AT THIS POINT IS RISKY SINCE MANY IMPONDERABLE FACTORS CONTINUE TO BE PRESENT IN THE CAMPAIGN: THE REAL MOOD AMONG THE RURAL VOTING BLOCS, THE IMPORTANCE THAT LOCAL ISSUES AND TRADITIONAL CASTE AND COMMUNAL FACTORS WILL HAVE ON VOTING BEHAVIOR, THE EFFECT OF A LAST-MINUTE CONGRESS CAMPAIGN BLITZ (SHOULD IT OCCUR) ON A SIZEABLE NUMBER OF CONSTITUENCIES, AND HOW POPULAR RESENTMENT OVER FAMILY PLANNING AND OTHER "EXCESSES" OF THE EMERGENCY, WHICH ARE SUBJECT TO WIDESPREAD OPEN CRITICISM AT THIS POINT OF TIME, WILL ACTUALLY TRANSLATE INTO VOTES WHEN POLLING DAY ARRIVES. MEANWHILE, MRS. GANDHI CONTINUES HER HECTIC TOURING AROUND THE COUNTRY. THE CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN REMARKABLY FREE OF VIOLENCE. THE GOI-CONTROLLED RADIO CONTINUES TO GIVE REASONABLY BALANCED ELECTION COVERAGE AND THE OPPOSITION AND CONGRESS CAMPAIGNS ARE BOTH FREELY AND COPIOUSLY COVERED IN THE DAILY PRESS. END SUMMARY.

1. WHILE THE EMBASSY CONTINUES TO BELIEVE THAT THE EVENTUAL RESULTS OF THE MARCH 16-20 LOK SABHA ELECTIONS, ARE UNPREDICTABLE, IT APPEARS THAT THE PRESS, OTHER OBSERVERS AND THE CONTESTING PARTIES THEMSELVES FEEL NO INHIBITION ON SPECULATING ABOUT THE OUTCOME. MOST, THOUGH NOT ALL, SEEM TO AGREE THAT CONGRESS IS CONFIDENTIAL

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ENGAGBSNUU A TOUGH FIGHT WITH THE OPPOSITION AND THAT THE SIZE OF THE WINNER'S MAJORITY IN THE LOK SABHA MAY BE RELATIVELY SMALL. DESPITE THE MANY IMPONDERABLES IN THIS ELECTION, BOTH SIDES PREDICT VICTORY; THE MARGIN OF VICTORY, HOWEVER, VARIES WIDELY. THIS MESSAGE REVIEWS AND SUMMARIZES THIS SPECULATION IN AN EFFORT TO CONVEY THE RANGE OF FIGURES WHICH ARE BEING BANDIED ABOUT.

2. PRESS REPORTS: NWTHE EMBASSY AND THE CONGRESS HAVE REVIEWED DOZENS OF ACCOUNTS IN THE PAPERS BY CORRESPONDENTS ON THE LIKELY OUTCOME OF ELECTORAL RACES IN INDIVIDUAL CONSTITUENCIES AROUND THE COUNTRY. THE EXTENT OF SUCH ASSESSMENTS VARIES FROM REGION TO REGION. IN THE NORTHERN "HINDI BELT" ALL THE WAY TO WEST BENGAL, THE MAJOR ENGLISH DAILIES APPEAR TO HAVE TAKEN SPECIAL INTEREST IN INDIVIDUAL CONTESTS, PERHAPS IN RECOGNITION OF THE CRUCIAL ROLE WHICH THESE STATES HAVE LAYED IN PAST CONGRESS VICTORIES AND ALSO OF THE IMPACT OF THE FAMILY PLANNING PROGRAM IN THE NORTH. IN WEST AND SOUTH INDIA BY CONTRAST NEWSPAPERS AND THEIR CORRESPONDENTS SEEM TO BE MORE CAUTIOUS AND HAVE GENERALLY BEEN MORE RELUCTANT TO ASSESS PROSPECTS IN SPECIFIC RACES. EVEN IN THE NORTH, HOWEVER, FEW JOURNALISTS HAVE BEEN WILLING TO MAKE FLAT PREDICTIONS OF THE OUTCOME, PREFERRING INSTEAD TO DESCRIBE CERTAIN "TOUGH BATTLES" AND "KEEN CONTESTS" SHAPING UP BETWEEN CONGRESS AND OPPOSITION CANDIDATES. ONLY IN RARE INSTANCES HAVE CORRESPONDENTS

PREDICTED A LIKELY WINNER. GENERALLY, THEY HAVE ASSESSED THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE CANDIDATES AND EVALUATED SPECIAL LOCAL FACTORS; AT MOST, SOME HAVE WRITTEN THAT ONE CANDIDATE APPEARS TO HAVE AN "EDGE" OVER THE OTHER BUT HAVE NOT GONE BEYOND THIS TENTATIVE CONCLUSION. THE WATERS ARE FURTHER MUDDIED BY THE FACT THAT NOT ALL CORRESPONDENTS AGREE ON WHAT CONSTITUTE THE "TOUGH CONTESTS", PROBABLY A RESULT OF THE MULTIPLICITY OF IMPONDERABLES IN INDIVIDUAL DISTRICTS. THUS, IN RAJASTHAN FOR EXAMPLE, ONE REPORTER RECENTLY DESCRIBED THE JODHPUR SEAT AS "SAFE" FOR CONGRESS WHILE ANOTHER CONCLUDED THAT THE RACE WAS TOO CLOSE TO CALL. MOREOVER, EVEN IN THE NORTH JOURNALISTS HAVE NOT COVERED EVERY CONSTITUENCY IN A STATE. THUS THEIR EVALUATIONS
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OF INDIVIDUAL CONTESTS CANNOT BE PROJECTED ONTO THE STATE-WIDE SCENE AS A WHOLE, MUCH LESS THE NATIONAL SCENE. EVEN ANALYSES OF 34 OF THE 85 DISTRICTS IN U.P. CANNOT BE INTERPRETED AS PORTENTS OF A "JANATA WIND" OR AN "INDIRA WAVE"; SPECIAL FACTORS IN THE OTHER (CONT....)

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O R 041335Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y-TEXT PARAS 3. AND 4.

51 COULD PORTEND AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT TREND. IN

ADDITION, MOST REPORTRES ARE PROBABLY BIASED IN FAVOR OF THE OPPOSITION (FEARING THE CONSEQUENCES OF A LARGE CONGRESS VICTORY) AND THIS BIAS IS REFLECTED IN THEIR REPORTING.

3. GIVEN THESE CAVEATS, THERE FOLLOWS EVALUATIONS OF SELECTED CONTESTS BY A VARIETY OF JOURNALISTS:

(A) THE NORTH: CORRESPONDENTS GENERALLY AGREE THAT A "JANATA WIND" IS BLOWING. OF 34 CONSTITUENCIES EXAMINED
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BY REPORTERS IN UPN THE CONSENSUS IS THAT FROM SEVEN TO TEN ARE TIGHT RACES TOO CLOSE TO CALL; SEVENTEEN OTHERS SEEM TO BE LEANING TOWARD JANATA/CFD CANDIDATES; AND ANOTHER SEVEN TOWARD CONGRESS. IN PUNJAB, TOSS-UPS ARE LIKELY IN THREE CONSTITUENCIES, WHILE THE CONGRESS APPEARS TO BE IN A FAVORABLE POSITION IN ONLY THREE SEATS, WITH THE REMAINING EIGHT DISTRICTS APPARENTLY LEANING TOWARD JANATA/AKALI DAL CANDIDATES. IN HARYANA A CLOSE RACE IS EXPECTED IN ONE CONSTITUENCY, WITH CONGRESS APPEARING "SAFE" IN FIVE DISTRICTS AND THE JANATA HAVING THE EDGE IN THE REMAINING FOUR. ESTIMATES IN RAJASTHAN VARY WIDELY, BUT IT IS GENERALLY AGREED THAT ONLY FIVE SEATS ARE "SAFE" FOR CONGRESS, WHILE THE JANATA APPEARS TO HAVE THE ADVANTAGE IN NINE OTHERS. SIX CONTESTS ARE DESCRIBED AS TOUGH, AND THERE ARE NO ESTIMATES ON THE REMAINING FIVE CONSTITUENCIES. THE JAMMU AND KASHMIR ARRANGEMENT (THREE SEATS EACH) BETWEEN THE CONGRESS AND THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE AT PRESENT APPEARS TO PORTEND THE EVENTUAL OUTCOME, ALTHOUGH JAMIAT-I- ISLAMI OPPONENTS IN THE VALE COULD OFFER A STRONG CHALLENGE. THE CONGRESS IS REPORTED TO BE SAFE IN JUST ONE DISTRICT IN HIMACHAL PRADESH; THE OTHER THREE CONTESTS ARE NOW DESCRIBED AS TOUGH. PRESS REPORTS GENERALLY AGREE THAT DIFFICULT CONTESTS ARE SHAPING UP FOR ALL OF DELHI'S SEVEN SEATS, WITH JANATA CANDIDATES HAVING AN EDGE IN MOST.

(B) THE EAST: CALCUTTA PAPERS HAVE REVIEWED 23 RACES; OF THESE THE REPORTS GIVE THE EDGE TO JANATA/CPM ALLIANCE IN NINE, TO THE CONGRESS/CPI IN EIGHT AND LIST SIX AS EVENLY MATCHED OR UNPREDICTABLE. REPORTS COVERING 22 OF BIHAR'S 54 SEATS HAVE APPEARED IN THE PATNA PRESS WHICH GIVE THE EDGE TO JANATA/CFD IN FIVE RACES, THE EDGE TO CONGRESS IN TWO, AND TO THE CPI IN ONE. THE REMAINING 14 CONTESTS ARE DESCRIBED AS TOO CLOSE TO PREDICT. THE DELHI PRESS HAS COVERED ELEVEN DISTRICTS IN BIHAR; SIX ARE LEANIG TOWARD JANATA/CFD, TWO TOWARD CONGRESS, AND THREE TOO CLOSE TO CALL. IN THE NORTHEAST STATES,
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CALCUTTA PAPERS SEE A CONGRESS ADVANTAGE IN FOUR DISTRICTS,

JANATA HAVING AN EDGE IN THREE, AND TWO OTHERS EVENLY MATCHED. REPORTING ON ORISSA HAS BEEN SCANTY, ALTHOUGH A REPORT IN ONE DELHI PAPER IN LATE FEBRUARY GAVE CONGRESS THE EDGE IN FOUR CONSTITUENCIES, JANATA IN ONE, AND DESCRIBED ANOTHER THREE AS TIGHT.

(C) THE WEST: THE BOMBAY PRESS HAS BEEN CAUTIOUS IN ITS PROJECTIONS OF THE LIKELY OUTCOME IN INDIVIDUAL RACES, AT MOST SAYING THAT THE CONGRESS IS ENGAGED IN A "STIFF FIGHT" IN THE 18 URBAN AND SEMI-URBAN DISTRICTS IN MAHARASHTRA. DELHI PRESS REPORTS ON RACES IN MAHARASHTRA ARE SKETCHY, BUT ONE RECENT ESTIMATE HAS IT THAT CONGRESS IS ENGAGED IN TOUGH FIGHTS IN SIX CONSTITUENCIES. A REVIEW OF REPORTS IN DELHI PAPERS REVEALS THAT THK CONGRESS IS SAID TO HAVE AN ADVANTAGE IN SIX CONTESTS IN GUJARAT, THE JANATA IN 13 AND THE OTHER SEVEN ARE TOO CLOSE TO CALL. MADHYA PRADESH HAS SIMILARLY RECEIVED THIN COVERAGE; ONE REPORT SPECULATES THAT CLOSE CONTESTS ARE LIKELY IN SIX DISTRICTS.

(D) THE SOUTH: NEWSPAPERS IN THE SOUTH AS WELL AS IN DELHI HAVE GENERALLY REFRAINED FROM MAKING PREDICTIONS. NO PRESS ACCOUNTS VENTURE BEYOND THE STATEMENT THAT CERTAIN CONGRESS CANDIDATES ARE PITTED AGAINST FORMIDABLE OPPONENTS. GIVEN THE LACK OF HARD DATA IN THE PAPERS, WE ARE UNABLE TO OFFER A STATE-BY-STATE EVALUATION.

4. THOUGH IT MAY BE IMPOSSIBLE TO EXTRAPOLATE FROM THESE SCATTERED RANDOM SAMPLINGS BY JOURNALISTS ANY NATION-WIDE PREDICTION OF THE EVENTUAL RESULTS OF THE POLL, IT IS CLEAR THAT MANY PEOPLE ARE OFFERING SPECULATION ON THE FINAL OUTCOME, BASED EITHER ON THEIR OWN STATE-BY- STATE EVALUATIONS OF THE CONTESTS OR ELSE ON THEIR PERSONAL INTUITION. THESE PREDICTIONS VARY CONSIDERABLY, BUT MOST SEEM TO FOCUS ON A REMARKABLY NARROW (AND CONSISTENT) RANGE OF FIGURES. VIRTUALLY NO ONE ESTIMATES CONFIDENTIAL

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THAT CONGRESS WILL WIN MORE THAN 325 SEATS; THE POSSIBILITY OF ITS GAINING ANOTHER TWO-THIRDS MAJORITY IS ALMOST COMPLETELY RULED OUT. SOME OBSERVERS (INCLUDING A NEWSPAPER EDITOR AND A FORMER CONGRESS OFFICIAL IN WEST BENGAL) HAVE PRIVATELY STATED THAT CONGRESS AMY CAPTURE AS FEW AS 250 SEATS. HOWEVER, MOST OF THE ESTIMATES WHICH WE AND THE CONGENS HAVE BEEN HEARING TEND TO CONCENTRATE ON CONGRESS PICKING UP BETWEEN 280 AND 300 SEATS: THE BRITISH SAY 290-300 AND "STATESMAN" EDITOR NIHAL SINGH CLAIMS BETWEEN 273 TO 319. THE COCKTAIL CIRCUITS IN DLEHI AND THE CONGEN CITIES BUZZ WITH A REMARKABLE CONSISTENCY, WITH VIRTUALLY ALL ESTIMATES HOVERING AROUND 300 OR SLIGHTLY LESS. AS FOR THE PREDICTIONS OF THE CONTESTING PARTIES, CONGRESS PRESIDENT BAROOAH HAS STATED THAT CONGRESS WILL WIN 300-325

WHILE MAHAMMED YUNUS PRIVATELY PUT THE FIGURE AT 325
IN A CONVERSATION WITH AN AMERICAN JOURNALIST. CFD LEADER
JAGJIVAN RAM HAS CATEGORICALLY AND REPEATEDLY STATED THAT
THE JANATA/CFD WILL WIN A MAJORITY IN THE LOK SABHA AND
FOR A GOVERNMENT.

5. THE CONGENS REPORT THAT THEIR SOURCES GENERALLY PREDICT
A VARYING LOSS OF SEATS FOR THE CONGRESS IN
MOST AREAS; IN WESTERN INDIA BOMBAY'S SOURCES SEE
CONGRESS LOSING AS MANY AS 13 SEATS FROM THE NUMBER IT
HELD IN THE DISSOLVED LOK SABHA; MOST OF THESE LOSSES
ARE IN GUJARAT, WITH A FEW ALSO POSSIBLE IN MAHARASHTRA.
CONGRESS SHOULD HOLD OR EVEN IMPROVE ITS POSITION IN MADHYA
PRADESH ACCORDING TO MOST CONGEN SOURCES, ALTHOUGH ONE
SAW A CHANCE OF LOSSES THERE TOO. CALCUTTA REPORTS FROM
ITS SOURCES THAT CONGRESS MAY GAIN TWO TO FIVE SEATS IN
WEST BENGAL, BUT LOSE FROM 14 TO 16 OF THOSE IT HELD IN
BIHAR. THE PICTURE IN ORISSA IS TOO MURKY FOR A RELIABLE
PREDICTION. IN THE SOUTH, MADRAS HEARS FROM ITS SOURCES
THAT ALTHOUGH CONGRESS MAY GAIN THREE OR FOUR SEATS IN
KERALA AND REMAIN EVEN IN TAMIL NADU (ALTHOUGH ITS AIADMK PARTNER
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MAY DO WELL), LOSSES IN KARNATAKA AND ANDHRA PRADESH
COULD CAUSE AN OVERALL LOSS OF BETWEEN NINE AND NINETEEN
SEATS IN THE SOUTHERN REGION. THE PICTURE THAT THUS
EMERGES COUNTRY-WIDE, ACCORDING TO THESE SOURCES,
IS THAT THE CONGRESS COULD LOSE UP TO 46 OF THE
SEATS WHICH IT HELD IN THE DISSOLVED LOK SABHA FROM THE
MAJOR STATES IN WESTERN, EASTERN AND SOUTHERN INDIA. WE
HAVE HEARD FROM OUR CONTACTS IN DELHI THAT CONGRESS
MAY LOSE AT LEAST 20 SEATS IN UP, SEVERAL EACH IN PUNJAB AND HARYANA
AND EITHER BREAK EVEN OR LOSE A SEAT OR TWO IN RAJASTHAN.

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MOST OF OUR SOURCES BELIEVE THAT CONGRESS WOULD DO WELL TO RETAIN ONE OR TWO OF THE SIX SEATS IT HELD FROM DELHI. WHILE ALL OF THESE PREDICTIONS VARY, IT IS REMARKABLE THAT THEY HAVE THE OVERALL EFFECT OF SLIMMING DOWN THE RULING PARTY'S MAJORITY IN THE LOK SABHA TO SOMEWHERE IN THE RANGE OF 275 TO 300, A MAJORITY WHICH MOST OBSERVERS AGREE, AND WHICH WE SHARE, WOULD BE TOO SLENDER FOR CONGRESS COMFORT.

6. WHILE REPORTING THIS SPECULATION FOR WHAT IT IS WORTH, WE ALSO MUST POINT OUT THAT A NUMBER OF IMPONDERABLE FACTORS
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ARE PRESENT IN THE CAMPAIGN. FOR EXAMPLE, AT THIS POINT NO ONE IS ABLE TO ACCURATELY ASSESS THE MOOD OF THE RURAL ELECTORATE WHICH, AS IN THE PAST, IS THE KEY VOTING BLOC IN THIS ELECTION. JOURNALISTS AND SOME OF OUR DIPLOMATIC COLLEAGUES HAVE TAKEN SPOT SAMPLINGS IN SELECTED RURAL AREAS, BUT IT WOULD BE FOOLHARDY TO ATTEMPT TO PROJECT THESE FINDINGS AS A TRUE REFLECTION OF THE POPULAR MOOD COUNTRY-WIDE OR EVEN IN A PARTICULAR STATE. TRADITIONAL CASTE AND COMMUNAL FACTORS, THE CONTINUING IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL ISSUES WITHIN INDIVIDUAL DISTRICTS (ELECTRICITY RATES, PRICES FOR AGRICULTURAL COMMODITIES, WATER RATES FOR IRRIGATION, AND SO ON) AND THE WIDE VARIATION IN PREVIOUS VOTING BEHAVIOR BETWEEN EVEN ADJOINING DISTRICTS MAKES SUCH A PROJECTION ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE. OPPOSITION LEADERS AND THE NEWSPAPERS TALK OF A "JANATA WIND" BLOWING THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY (PARTICULARLY IN THE NORTH) AND JANATA SPEAKERS CONFIDENTLY PREDICT THAT THE FORCE OF THIS WIND, GAINING MOMENTUM FROM POPULAR RESENTMENT OVER STERILIZATION, BUREAUCRATIC EXCESSES AND OTHER ASPECTS OF THE EMERGENCY, WILL SWEEP THEM INTO OFFICE. MANY OBSERVERS TEND TO SHARE THIS VIEW, BASED UPON THE GREAT ENTHUSIASM DEMONSTRATED BY CROWDS AT THE JANATA RALLIES IN DELHI ON MARCH 1 (SEE NEW DELHI 3058), WHEN REFERENCES TO FAMILY PLANNING AND FORCED RESETTLEMENT OF SLUM-DWELLERS EVOKED CRIES OF "SHAME". BUT WE SHOULD POINT OUT THAT DELHI IS AN INTENSELY POLITICIZED CITY WHERE ISSUES TEND TO BE MAGNIFIED OUT OF PROPORTION. WHILE WE HEAR FROM TRAVELERS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE OF NORTHERN INDIA THAT RESENTMENT OVER STERILIZATION AND GENERAL OFFICIAL "HIGHHANDEDNESS" IS INTENSE, WE WONDER WHETHER AND HOW THIS RESENTMENT WILL BE TRANS-

LATED INTO VOTES WHEN THE POLLING DAY ARRIVES. A PEASANT IN U.P. WHO HAS ALWAYS VOTED CONGRESS MAY BE ANGRY OVER INSTANCES OF MRS. GANDHI'S "AUTHORITARIANISM", BUT OTHER FACTORS--SUCH AS RECENTLY-ANNOUNCED GOVT CONCESSIONS AND THE POSSIBILITY OF A LAST-MINUTE CONGRESS CAMPAIGN BLITZ--MAY WEIGH MORE HEAVILY IN HIS MIND AS HE APPROACHES THE BALLOT BOX TWO WEEKS HENCE. EVERYONE AGREES THAT THE COMING FINAL WEEK AND A HALF OF THE CAMPAIGN WILL BE CURCIAL: IN SOME AREAS THE CONGRESS CAMPAIGN HAS BARELY GOTTEN UNDERWAY, AND SOME OBSERVERS SPECULATE THAT THE PARTY MAY BE HOLDING BACK

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ON ITS RESOURCES IN THE EXPECTATION THAT THE JANATA WAY MAY CREST, AT WHICH TIME THE RULING PARTY WOULD UNDERTAKE A LAST-MINUTE CAMPAIGN BLITZ. SHOULD THIS HAPPEN, THE CONGRESS MAY BE ABLE TO EKE OUT VICTORIES BY NARROW MARGINS IN ENOUGH CONSTITUENCIES TO ENSURE ITSELF A COMFORTABLE MAJORITY IN THE LOK SABHA. IT IS BECAUSE OF THESE MANY IMPONDEABLES THAT THIS ELECTION IS SO HARD TO CALL AND WHY WE TREAT ALL PREDICTIONS WITH THE UTMOST CAUTION.

7. AS FOR ATMOSPHERE, THE PRIME MINISTER CONTINUES HER BARNSTORMING TOURS AROUND THE COUNTRY: IN THE PAST WEEK SHE HAS VISITED EASTERN U.P; BIHAR, DELHI, GUJARAT AND MAHARASHTRA; TODAY SHE IS ON THE ROAD IN ANDHRA PRADESH. HER SPEECHES HAVE REITERATED THE USUAL THEMES, AND VERY LITTLE NEW GROUND HAS BEEN BROKEN IN TERMS OF ISSUES, ALTHOUGH SHE APPEARS TO BE MAKING MORE FREQUENT REFERENCES TO THE RSS. WE HAVE NOTED INCREASING REPORTS OF VIOLENCE APPARENTLY ASSOCIATED WITH THE CAMPAIGN, BUT THESE ARE SCATTERED INCIDENTS OF A RELATIVELY MINOR (I.E;NON-LETHAL) NATURE; THEY DO NOT APPEAR SERIOUS ENOUGH TO DAMAGE THEELECTORAL PROCESS. IN FACT, A SENIOR WEST BENGAL POLICE OFFICER TOLD CONGEN CALCUTTA OFFICERS MARCH 3 THAT IT WAS THE QUIETEST ELECTION HE HAD EVER SEEN. ALL INDIA RADIO (AT LEAST OUT OF DELHI) CONTINUES TO PRESENT FAIRLY BALANCED BROADCASTS OF CONGRESS AND OPPOSITION STATEMENTS,WHILE THE PRESS CONTINUES TO FURIOUSLY REPORT OPPOSITION DOINGS. SO FAR WE HAVE HEARD OF NO INDICATIONS OF FOUL PLAY OR OTHER INTERFERENCE IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS.

8. IN A MARCH 4 REVIEW OF THE ELECTORAL SCENE WITH OUR COLLEAGUES FROM 10 DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS HERE IN DELHI, GENERAL ASSESSMENTS CLOSELY PARALLELED THOSE CITED IN THE PRECEDING PARAGRAPHS. A FEW SUPPLEMENTARY ITEMS OF INTEREST DID EMERGE, HOWEVER: (A) ONE DIPLOMAT HAD RECENTLY RETURNED FROM EXTENSIVE TRAVELS IN THE SOUTH AND WAS STRUCK BY THE CONTRAST WITH THE NORTHERN "HINDI BELT"; THE CONGRESS CAMPAIGN APPEARED TO BE IN FULL SWING AND CONGRESSMEN WERE QUITE SANGUINE ABOUT THEIR PROSPECTS.

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IN ADDITION, THE "EMERGENCY ISSUES" DOMINATING THE NORTHERN

SCENE (PARTICULARLY FAMILY PLANNING) ARE VIRTUALLY NONEXISTENT IN THE SOUTH. (B) THE GERMANS TELL US THAT THEY HAVE HEARD THAT CONGRESS MAY WIN AS FEW AS 15 SEATS IN U.P; AND THERE ALSO WAS SPECULATION CONGRESS MAY NOT DO AS WELL AS ORIGINALLY THOUGHT IN STATE THAT ARE CONSIDERED TRADITIONAL STRONGHOLDS MAHARASHTRA WAS MENTIONED IN THIS CONTEXT). (C) THE BRITISH MENTIONED THAT THEY HAD HEARD THIS WEEK FROM SOMEONE THEY DESCRIBE AS BEING ONE OF THE PM'S CLOSE ADVISERS THAT 245 SEATS ARE THE MAXIMUM NUMBER HE SEES AS POSSIBLE FOR THE CONGRESS. FINALLY, (D) A CONGRESS MLA AND SECRETARY OF THE CONGRESS LEGISLATIVE PARTY IN U.P. TOLD EMBOFFS MARCH 4 THAT, ALTHOUGH HE WAS TELLING THE PRESS THAT CONGRESS WOULD GET A "COMFORTABLE" MAJORITY IN U.P; ACTUALLY HE THOUGHT THE CONGRESS WOULD BE EXTREMELY LUCKY TO GET EVEN 30 SEATS. HE ADDED: "WE WILL, OF COURSE, TRY TO BUY SOME MORE". THE SAME SOURCE CLAIMED CREDIT FOR AN OTHERWISE UNATTRIBUTED QUOTE IN THIS MORNING'S "TIMES OF INDIA" THAT "THESE DAMNED VASECTOMIES HAVE BECOME SOMETHING LIKE THE GREASED CARTRIDGES OF 1857".
SCHNEIDER

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